



Tarawa Division enters Sunni Triangle

Sgt. Stephen D'Alessio
2nd Marine Division

CAMP BLUE DIAMOND, Ar Ramadi, Iraq -- Maj. Gen. Richard F. Natonski, commanding general for 1st Marine Division, will transfer responsibility of the Al Anbar province this month to Maj. Gen. Richard A. Huck, commanding general for 2nd Marine Division.

The shift of control is a continuation of the stability and security operations already being conducted by Marine Corps units since March 2004. Although the 2nd Marine 'Tarawa' Division, from Camp Lejeune, N.C., is officially taking over operational responsibility for the infamously treacherous region, units from the division have already been in place for some time.

"Understand that this (relief in place) began months ago; we're not new here," said Col. Bob Chase, 2nd Marine Division operations officer.



Sgt. Stephen D'Alessio

Maj. Gen. Richard A. Huck, 2nd Marine Division commanding general, speaks to his officers and enlisted personnel during the Transfer of Authority ceremony with Maj. Gen. Richard F. Natonski, 1st Marine Division commanding general, March 17. Natonski relinquished authority of operations in the Al Anbar Province to Huck during the ceremony.

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Keeping Fallujah safe, one patrol at a time

Cpl. Mike Escobar
2nd Marine Division

FALLUJAH, Iraq -- "It's like the Super Bowl. You train so much to do it, and when you get there, you show everyone what you've got."

That's how Lance Cpl. Fermin Garcia views his unit's deployment to Iraq. It's his chance to put the security and stability operations training the Marine Corps gave him to the ultimate test: keeping insurgents and weapons out of Fallujah.

To accomplish this, the 19-year-old infantryman with the Camp Lejeune, N.C.-based Company C, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment and his fellow Marines patrol the city streets every day, searching for terrorists, illegal arms and ammunition, and anti-Iraqi government propaganda.

The Orangeburg, N.Y. native's unit recently replaced the California-based 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, one of the units respon-

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sible for neutralizing the insurgency in Fallujah.

"For now, we're just doing routine presence patrols through the city," the 2004 Tappansee High School graduate stated. "The kids are out on the streets, waving to us as we pass by. As long as that continues, it's a good sign that things are under control."

However, Garcia keeps the Marine adage of "Complacency Kills" in mind as he performs his daily work.

"Even though it's calm and quiet right now, we always prepare for

anything and learn to expect the unexpected. We're always aware that something bad could happen if we get too relaxed."

The Marines and sailors of Company C are keeping their guards up as they oversee their area of responsibility in northwestern Fallujah. In addition to conducting daily patrols, the unit mans both a vehicle and personnel Entry Control Point (ECP) outside the city to regulate traffic influx into Fallujah.

But the battalion does not perform these missions alone. Unit personnel work hand in hand with the Iraqi Se-

curity Force soldiers as they sweep through Fallujah's alleyways and search people and vehicles entering the city.

"I'm really glad the Iraqi forces are here," Garcia said. "Everything we do in this part of the city we do with them. On patrol, they tell all the cars where to go while we pass through, and they help us overcome a huge language barrier while talking to the people in the city."

"They're (ISF) really disciplined guys too," he added. "They've helped us out a lot with manpower (by supplying additional troops to run the ECP and constantly patrolling the city streets)."

Working with the local forces also adds credibility to the American presence in Iraq. Fallujah's residents observe ISF leading patrols and handling the ECP, so they see U.S. forces are merely helping the Iraqis provide security to their own country.

By patrolling alongside the local forces and his fellow Marines, Garcia said he hopes to have a successful seven-month deployment and looks forward to the mission ahead.

"These patrols (through Fallujah) are just like the ones we trained for back in the States, only now it's time to really show what we can do."



Gunnery Sgt. Robert Knoll

Third Platoon, Company C, 1st Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment patrols through the city streets here March 21. The unit is currently deployed here to conduct security and stability operations.

Notes and asides

Camp Fallujah

Worship Services & Bible Study Schedule

Friday
11:30 a.m. - Catholic Mass
1 p.m. - Muslim prayer
6 p.m. - Jewish worship service

7:30 p.m. - Gospel choir
Saturday
6 p.m. - Catholic Mass
7 p.m. - Protestant communion
8 p.m. - Apostolic/Pentacostal Bible study

MWR events

Swinging Sunday: There

will be swing dancing lessons held at the MWR recreation center from 5 to 7 p.m. Bring a partner.
Old School Jam Night: Come out to the recreation center and land jam with the rest of the camp. Tonight from 9:30 p.m. to 1 a.m.
Salsa Night: Tomorrow night at the recreation

center from 9:30 p.m. to 1 a.m.
Dart Night: Come out and join the fun throwing some darts. The action starts at 7 p.m.
For more information contact the MWR supervisor at: crystal.nadeau@halliburton.com

Interceptor system saves lives daily

Sgt. Donald Bohanner
MCB Quantico

MARINE CORPS BASE QUANTICO, Va. -- Since December 2003, the Marine Corps has been fielding the Interceptor system to Marines deployed in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

The Interceptor system, a personal body armor system, is comprised of the Outer Tactical Vest and the Small Arms Protective Inserts. The OTV was designed for use with SAPI plates and replaces the Personnel Armor System, Ground Troop Flak vest, more commonly known as the flak vest.

"The old flak vests were only designed to defeat fragmentation and have no way of holding a SAPI plate or stopping a bullet," said Maj. Wendell Leimbach, Combat Equipment Infantry Combat Equipment team leader, Marine Corps Systems Command. "The new OTVs are designed to defeat fragmentation and hold the SAPI plates. Together, the Interceptor System provides protection from 7.62 mm and 5.56 mm rounds," he added.

As of Feb. 15, the Marine Corps issued 184,047 SAPI plates and 181,596 OTVs to deploying units and

plans to purchase an additional 8,500 OTVs and 36,000 plates by the end of October.

"Since the second rotation of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Marine Corps has ensured that every Marine and sailor receive an Interceptor system prior to going to theater," said Leimbach.

But the success of the Interceptor hasn't come without some challenges.

"During the last rotation of I Marine Expeditionary Force in Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Marine Corps was still producing as many OTVs and SAPI plates as we could possibly get our hands on," explained Leimbach. "We had a mandate that every Marine would receive an Interceptor system prior to going into theater."

During the testing and purchasing process, the Marine Corps started to receive test data on some of the OTVs that were low. This was clearly a concern the Marine Corps had to address.

"We looked at the data to see how far off they were from the acceptable levels of ballistic performance," said Leimbach. "It was easy to identify the

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Scout (FORWARD)

I Marine Expeditionary Force

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Scouting Around (Forward)

What is your family Easter tradition that you will miss this year?



Sgt. Shaun L. Grant
S-4, II MHG

"Well, we have Easter egg hunts but I can't hide the eggs because none of the kids can find them when I hide them."



Petty Officer Chad V. Pritt
Seabees 30th Naval Const. Reg.

"My wife and kids will be hunting for Easter eggs. Nothings changing this year except Dad's not home."



PFC Matthew G. Russo
8th Communication Battalion

"I go to our family church on Sunday and then my family comes to my house to visit."

G-6 tackles computer surge

Lance Cpl. Aaron P. Mankin
II Marine Expeditionary Force

Fallujah Marines troubleshoot hard drives after arrival of II MEF

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq – Computers are a daily concern for Marines here as they try to accomplish a variety of mission oriented tasks. From e-mails to images, each command has their own needs. It is up to the G-6 help desk to ensure these machines are operating correctly.

The help desk is an administration tool used to answer questions and provide assistance to service members with computers, radios, phones and any other communication device.

“We are trying our best to give the help desk a good name,” said Lance Cpl. Josh M. Serrato, network administrator with 8th Communications Battalion, II Marine Expeditionary Force.

Serrato is on his second deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom as an individual augment from 9th Communications Battalion, I Marine Expeditionary Force.

“Everyday I learn something new about my job. Had I not come to Iraq, I wouldn’t know all of the things that I do now. I’m able to help more customers with more problems,” said Serrato.

A focus of the help desk is to help everyone with all of their technical needs in a timely and professional manner according to

Staff Sgt. Robert D. Lassiter, the G-6 help desk staff noncommissioned officer in charge.

“We get a lot of traffic through here,” he said. “We treat every person with a priority. There have been several hundred computers brought to us that need our attention.”

The Marines manning the help desk have worked on more than a thousand computers since II MEF arrived here for the transfer of authority with I MEF. The number of machines surged as the units overlapped their forces for the transition, said Lassiter.

“We have never had this many computers on our desk before. A lot of the problems that we see can be taken care of without bringing the computer to the help desk. Little things like checking all of the cable connections could save everyone

time,” explained Lassiter.

The help desk has dealt with crashed hard drives and even rats chewing through cables.

The largest task the help desk faces is to ensure all computers have a current internet protocol number. The IP number works like a telephone number and helps the network recognize where each machine is located.

“This process can be time consuming. All we ask for is patience,” said Lassiter.

The Marines at the G-6 are trained to handle any technical problem. With a point and click, they plan to keep computers operating and Marines connected.

For more information regarding computer assistance, contact the G-6 help desk at 3400-603.



Lance Cpl. Aaron P. Mankin

Marines with 8th Communications Battalion, 2nd Marine Expeditionary Force, operate the G-6 help desk here. The help desk assists Marines with setting up e-mail accounts and troubleshooting.

'269 Ordnance: Keeping Gunrunners locked and loaded

Cpl. Rocco DeFilippis
2nd Marine Aircraft Wing

AL ASAD, Iraq -- Highly effective against personnel, vehicles and buildings, the AH-1 Super Cobra has proven itself over the past 40 years as one of the world's most reliable attack helicopters.

Combined with the versatility of the UH-1 Huey, the Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron has earned a reputation for superiority in the skies above the battlefield.

It is the skill and hard work of ordnance Marines who load, arm and maintain the Cobras' and Heuys' deadly arsenal.

The ordnance Marines of Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 269 work 24 hours a day to ensure the "Gunrunners" are ready at a moments notice to deliver death and destruction to the enemy.

"The whole purpose of the aircraft is a weapon system," said Chief Warrant Officer James A. Toponce, HMLA-269 ordnance officer and native of Melbourne, Fla. "If the ordnance doesn't work, there is no reason for the aircraft to fly."



Gunnery Sgt. Shannon Arledge

Cpl. Corey R. Waincott, ordnance technician with Marine Light Attack Helicopter 269 and native of Kirklin, Ind., assist the loading of a Hellfire air to ground missile onto one of the squadron's AH-1W Super Cobras. The Marines in aviation ordnance spend their days and nights ensuring the squadron's Cobras and UH-1N Huey helicopters have the ordnance they need to defeat and root out insurgents in their area of operations.

Responsible for loading, arming and inspecting ammunition, rockets and missiles, the ordnancemen are on the flight line throughout the day to ensure the birds are ready for launch.

"Our number one responsibility is to ensure that the weapons systems are properly loaded and armed, so they work when the pilot needs them," said Cpl. Corey R. Waincott, ordnance technician and native of Kirklin, Ind. "With a full crew, we need less than 15 minutes to load and arm the helos so they can get in the air and provide support to the troops on the ground."

With such an important responsibility, the ordnancemen constantly train and prepare in order to stay on top of their job.

"These Marines don't waste a second," said Gunnery Sgt. Greg T. Scott, ordnance chief and native of Centralia, Ill. "They are extremely well trained and they have instilled in them that every second they waste is a second that someone could be dying."

The mastery of their craft comes from extensive training in realistic environments and combat experience. About 70 percent of the Marines in the HMLA-269 ordnance section deployed with the squadron to support Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003.

"The first deployment was extremely fast paced and we learned a lot," said Cpl. John B. Schillero, ordnance technician and native of Seven Hills, Ohio. "Now, however, we are the only HMLA here, so we are applying that experience to do our part to ensure that every opportunity for our aircraft to support the ground side goes answered."

"It's amazing to see these Marines in action," Scott said. "The noncommissioned officers have the experience to teach and guide the newer Marines through the whole process. The newer Marines have learned more in one month than they would have learned in six back home."

Arriving here on the first of February, the Gunrunners' ordnance Marines continue to ensure the Cobras bite remains sharp.

"These Marines are tireless in their efforts to ensure 100 percent mission readiness," Toponce said. "Our piece of the puzzle is highly important to the mission, and we will continue to do what we have been doing to support the Marines on the ground."

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“Many current ‘ops’ were planned in conjunction between the 1st Marine Division and ourselves over the course of a few months. One of the most recent operations, River Blitz, was a joint 1st and 2nd Marine Division operation. But certainly the final decisions rested with the commander on the ground.”

The Tarawa Division will continue most of the techniques, tactics and procedures the 1st Marine Division established, according to Chase. The 2nd Marine Division will continue to refine and adopt new methods of thwarting insurgent activity.

“A few things we bring to the fight are a fresh set of eyes and a shift of focus as we partner more with the (Iraqi Security Forces),” said Chase. “There’s a pride that certainly comes with the changeover as the Marines of our division move into this area of operations, and continue to build on the successes of 1st Division.”

With the recent Iraqi elections, the local military has stepped into a larger role, according to Chase. The Tarawa Division is taking action to help strengthen the bond between the Marines and the Iraqi Security Forces. In turn, it is the division’s goal to share more of the responsibility for security and stabilization in the re-

gion with the ISF.

“One of our main focuses here is training with the ISF,” said Chase. “We’ll see some fights out here, but the good news is we won’t do it alone.”

As the 2nd Marine Division fully integrates as a task-organized unit, the Marines are bringing their hard-earned experience to the fight in the Global War on Terrorism.

Chase concluded by saying, “We have some new ideas, and we’re well rested. That will help us finish what the 1st Marine Division did well. We owe that to the Marines to not let their work go to the wayside.”

OTV, from Page 3

fact that, despite the vest not being at full ballistic capability as outlined in the specification, they were still dramatically better than the alternative.”

The alternative was to send Marines into theater wearing an old flak system.

“It was never a doubt that all of the vests were clearly better than the PASGT system,” said Leimbach.

The OTVs that received lower ballistic performance ratings were still stopping 9 mm rounds during testing.

“The way we test the vests is by placing a clay block behind the OTV,” explained Leimbach. “We judge the effectiveness of the vest by the size of the impression that is left in the clay. Some of the impressions left were larger than what was specified in the purchase description.”

Despite problems found in some of the testing, it was clear that the Interceptor System was significantly better than the PASGT Flak vest, he said.

“The PASGT flak could not hold a SAPI plate and can not stop a round, so the choice was clear to sign the waivers for specific vests that showed lower-than-optimal performance on ballistics,” explained Leimbach.

During the Vietnam War, 70 percent of casualties with penetrating chest wounds and 33 percent of casualties with penetrating abdominal wounds died. Throughout OIF and OEF only 5 percent of casualties resulted from torso wounds.

Reducing the number of penetrations has a significant

effect on reducing the fatality rates. The large reduction in fatalities can be directly attributed to the improved protection provided by the combination of the OTV and SAPI inserts being worn by Marines on the battlefield today as well as the amazing medical care that is available so close to the combat zones, said Leimbach.

“It’s impossible to get an accurate number of how many Marines’ lives have been saved by the Interceptor system. I’ve heard many stories of Marines on patrol in Iraq and the SAPI plate stopped a bullet or improvised explosive device that would have otherwise killed him,” said Leimbach. “The most important thing to note is the Interceptor system is saving hundreds, if not thousands, of lives.”

The Marine Corps is currently developing the next phase of the system, which will include the most up-to-date design and manufacturing capabilities, and will extend protection to the rest of the body.

“Right now the Marine Corps is undergoing a program to look at the Interceptor system and identify what areas of the body may need additional protection,” Leimbach said. “We are sensitive to the weight issues that are out there and don’t want to overburden the Marine, but what we are trying to do is identify a way to provide the Marine an option to increase or decrease the level of ballistic protection they’re wearing, depending on the threat and mission.”

So far, the Marines have started to test upper arm and upper leg protection that fastens to the OTV. More than 2,000 arm and leg protectors have been fielded in Iraq.

Supply opens doors for business

Issues gear one boot at a time

Cpl. Christi Prickett
II Marine Expeditionary Force

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq - - When the nearest Wal-Mart is over 6,000 miles away, what do you do about getting the supplies you need? Second Marine Expeditionary Force supply is ready to answer the call.

Gunnery Sgt. John T. Prejean, current II Marine Headquarters Group supply chief and native of Dunellen, N.J., knows the work is tough and appreciates his previous counterpart's hard work.

"First MEF started with the bare minimum. They built the inventory and back lot from the ground up to what it is today," Prejean explained. "I'm glad they paved the way for us. Now it is time to take it to the next level."

Supply Marines have been working hard to get the gear they issue organized.

"Since we are turning over to a new commander, this gives him a picture of what is under his charge and to effectively employ its

capabilities," Prejean said.

A five-day inventory was completed on Tuesday.

"All the Marines worked long hours inventorying the gear in the back lot," said Lance Cpl. Cody R. Powell. "We got it done a day earlier than we expected. We accomplished the mission of finding out what I MEF left, and what we need to order."

Even though the inventory was time consuming, Prejean said it was necessary.

"The reason we did the inventory was to accurately account for all major property because loss of property hinders the unit's effectiveness," he said.

There are only a few requirements to fulfill when someone needs gear. The first is the written request.

"If you have a requirement for let's say tents, it is required to send us a logistics request so that we can locate the gear and have it ready for you to pick up on that day," explained Prejean.

The second requirement is to be understanding.

"Support goes two ways," he said.

Mission essential gear is always a priority when requests come in. This includes personal protective equipment like ballistic eyewear, kevlar helmets and Small Arms Protective Insert plates.

Powell, native of Forney, Texas, likes his job, even though it can be demanding.

"If people need supplies, they will ask for them. The problem is that we don't always have the supplies on hand," he said. "If people can be patient, we will try our best to work with them to get what they need."

Prejean wants his shop to be known as a professional, hard-working group supporting the needs of the command.

"Everybody needs our support," said Powell. "Much of the gear from the entire base comes through us and we issue it out. It's a great feeling when we can make units operational because of our hard work."



Cpl. Christi Prickett

Lance Cpl. Cody R. Powell, assistant warehouse chief, and Sgt. Mark A. Kreider, G-6 operations, unpack a box from one of the containers in the back lot of supply. After a five-day inventory of gear in stock, supply is now open to the camp.

Islander proud to be a part of history

Staff Sgt. Ronna M. Weyland
II Marine Expeditionary Force

CAMP FALLUJAH, Iraq -- Sitting under a palm tree, with a cool breeze similar to the Trade winds found on the beaches of Hawaii, an island native recalls experiences of his last seven months in Iraq.

During his deployment, the 30-year-old found himself in the midst of history in the making.

Kailua-Kona, Hawaii, native Staff Sgt. Jason K. Teixeira, Combat Service Support Group 3, Maintenance Company, Motor Transport Maintenance Platoon, Marine Corps Base Hawaii, arrived in Iraq Sept. 17, 2004, as an individual augment and information operations chief.

"I filled this billet because I wanted to be a part," explained Teixeira. "However, I never thought I would be pushed down to the battalion level. I never thought I would be at the tip of the spear."

After being assigned to 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Division, Camp Pendleton, Calif., the motor transport chief made the most out of his three-day crash course on information operations upon arriving in Iraq.

"We passed out a lot of flyers and hand bills telling people what was going to happen," he recalled. "There were some schools set up in the refugee area and I assisted with that as well."

Within two months, Teixeira found himself crossing the Line of Departure heading to the city of Fallujah, Iraq.

"It was kind of strange," he described. "Everyone was kind of quiet and there was a look of concern on all our faces, but everyone was very focused. Going through my mind was the thought I could be killed or someone around me could be killed."

It wasn't too long after entering the city before the 12-year veteran realized the battle for Fallujah was going to be serious.

"I remember hearing a crackling sound right near my head and parts of the building sprayed down on me," recalled the 1992 Kona Waena High School graduate with a slight laugh. "That was real. Myself and another staff sergeant just looked at each other and said 'holy smokes that was kind of close.'"

During the push to clear the city of insurgents, Teixeira spent time with all the platoons within 3/1.

"I became close to a lot of those guys

and there are things I will never forget. We saw a lot of stuff out there," he said. "The bravery from these guys was all around us."

Prior to arriving in Hawaii, Teixeira was a recruiter at Recruiting SubStation Littleton, Recruiting Station Denver, Colo.

"While I was on recruiting, I heard a lot of people say this new generation of Marine Corps isn't as tough, and I thought that sometimes too," he remembered. "But, I know my thoughts have changed after what I have seen. I have seen some amazing things from these infantry guys. The young PFC's (privates first class) busting into houses and not even thinking twice. It was just amazing.

"All the Marines did what they had to do and I don't know if that comes from training or what, but it just happens... Marines do what they have got to do."

He added the bonds and memories made will never be forgotten.

"I became close to a lot of those guys and there are things I will never forget," he explained. "We saw a lot of stuff out there."

Lance Cpl. James E. Swain, 20, Headquarters Battalion, 1st Marine Division, Camp Pendleton is one of the Marines he will never forget.

"I needed batteries one time and Lance Cpl. Swain shared his with me," he recalled.

Swain, a Kokomo, Ind. native, was later killed in action during the battle Nov. 15, 2004.

"When someone got hurt or was killed I would always think about the family," said Teixeira with watery eyes.

"It made me think about my family and what it would be like for them if something happened to me," he explained.

With the battle over now, Teixeira is hopeful for the future of Fallujah.

"The city went from being the most dangerous place to be, to what I believe is now the safest city in Iraq."

Teixeira will be back to Camp Pendleton by the end of the month. He hopes to be back in Hawaii by April.



Courtesy Photo

Staff Sgt. Jason K. Teixeira, attached to 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment as an information operations chief, was part of history when he participated in the battle of Fallujah November 2004.